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ABSTRACT

A practical orthography is presented for Kuuk Thaayorre, which is spoken by over 300 Aborigines in Australia. The phonemes in Thaayorre and the way they are symbolized in normal writing practice are presented. Frequent occurrence of six conventional digraphs for some Thaayorre consonants has given rise to complementary orthography as an initial teaching alphabet in the elementary primer. Stress is not symbolized; it is deducible from the context by certain rules regarding suffixation, compounds, and fused phrases. In the appendices, orthographic comparison with English is presented for the following cases: (1) no difference in sound or symbol; (2) same symbol with different sound; (3) entirely new symbol in English; (4) comparison of punctuation; (5) comparison of vowel blends, glides, and diphthongs; (6) word families; (7) consonant clusters; (8) sounds occurring in different places; (9) interference between the two languages; (10) syllable patterns different in English; (11) stress patterns vary; and (12) vernacular sound transferred to English. A phoneme chart is also appended. (SW)

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A PRACTICAL ORTHOGRAPHY FOR KUUK THAAYORRE

David Ingram

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Kuuk Thaayorre is spoken by over 300 Aborigines who still know a dozen or more clan-lects at Edward River, 18 miles south of the Edward River and nearly 50 miles north of the Mitchell River. The Chapman River and Mungkun Creek also closely embrace the composite community of diverse clans.

Pormpuraaw State Primary School has 4 European teachers and 4 Aboriginal Teaching Assistants who use the vernacular and also English for 93 children including 3 white staff children. Thus, our orthography needs clearcut precision when Kuuk Thaayorre, a language having 3 degrees of stress, is the vernacular medium with English for literacy and lingua franca to an entire community.

We aim to keep contrasting words apart, but not as in English pear/pair/pare; rather as in [k^húl^umun] 'food-dish' or /kulmun/, separate from [k^húl^um-ən] 'on the track', where 2 emic syllables contrast with 3, though we write no accents above the vowel nuclei of syllables to indicate those 3 degrees of stress.

Another example could be: /raak ngānch-án/ 'in a taboo place' which contrasts with the unabbreviated form of /raak ngānch(in)-án/ 'our place', but not with the abbreviation, easily distinguishable from context. Note also the following: /nāngkan/ 'your (sg)' and /nāngk-án/ 'in hot (ashes)' and compare them to /nāngk-ún/ 'to/for you (sg)'. But we still write no accents, relying on contextual clues to meaning.

Some ambiguities may occur in the grouping of words such as in the following phrases which appear in one of our stories, and the reader must make up his mind what is intended:

either: /mính kǎl/		/mính kál/
	or:	
'animal rat'		'animal carry!'

Our stance in a bilingual programme aims to please different critical approaches, sooner or later. The linguistic purist must be satisfied that every phoneme has its logical symbolic representation, and that one's "epenthesis" has put vowels between the right pairs of consonants. The practical educationalist should be convinced concerning his allophonic suspicions of the linguist's list of phonemes. A local indigenous initiated man must be able to learn how to read and write his own language which he only speaks, as the literacy programme stretches out before him. But the ordinary schoolteacher must be happy with what appears to him rather crazy spelling in some words.

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Government administrators squirm at strange consonant sequences, seemingly too divergent from the trade language, English, whose 'lay' spellings they prefer in official documents and registers of names in births, deaths and marriages. We merely mention the difficulties of choosing acceptable street names in their community as the native council wished to preserve cherished names of inland birthplaces whose spelling would defeat any clerical employee wishing to pronounce what he had written. Again, mission authorities sometimes have very definite ideas when it comes to spelling Hebrew and Greek words from their Bible translations and services of worship. Finally, the Literacy Specialist must see the orthography as being efficient for his campaign of teaching Aborigines to read and write. As teacher, missionary, linguist and literacy worker, I know four of these critics.

What then are the phonemes in Thaayorre and how are they symbolised in normal writing practice? From the chart in Appendix (c) we confirm 6 stops, : p th t ch k and glottal stop '. The first five are paralleled by 5 nasals at the same points of articulation, bilabial, (inter-)dental, alveolar (though slightly retroflexed), palatal and velar: m nh n ny and ng.

Why then do we not write: b dh d dy and g? Because in Thaayorre, the voiceless released stop is the (most common) phonetic norm, both word-initially and word-finally. Five other consonants occur, the two semivowels, w and y, the American apico-retroflexed [ɾ], the Scottish alveolar trilled /rr/ and finally, the (liquid) /l/.

Frequent occurrence of 6 conventional digraphs for some Thaayorre consonants has given rise to complementary orthography as an I.T.A. (Initial Teaching Alphabet) in the Elementary Primer, comprising only 10 lessons (expanded) in 40 units of graded tuition. There only do we use ɲ for ng; h (tall n) for nh; and ʰ for th. The others are not met with in Primer I, such as ɳ for ny and c for ch. We have no alternative for trilled alveolar rr which contrasts with r (retroflex). As each of the 5 vowels may be long or short, we double each vowel for length thus:

a aa e ee i ii o oo u uu.

A number of letters still remains 'spare' from our English symbols: b d f g j q s v x z and these require extra tuition beyond the scope of the early primer lessons. They must be taught in the diglot lessons of Primer V (41-50), aided by the English-speaking teacher who will collaborate and incorporate them in suitable passages at that level. Spare letters usable only in the I.T.A., are c and h, though later they form ch.

Someone may ask why we spell words with th- word-initially. This is because certain exclamatory CVC words (not to mention the t-initial loan words from English) begin with t- so that a contrast occurs between /tak/ and /thak/, between /tep/ and /thep/, between /tok/ and /thok/. Why then do we not begin our n-initial words with nh-? We did! But, because every known such word begins with a 'dental' nh- and only one placename seems to have turned up with an initial alveolar n-, native speakers confirmed my wish not to write hundreds of h's unnecessarily where contrast does not occur word-initially.

We do not symbolise stress, which is deducible from the context by certain rules regarding suffixation, compounds, and fused phrases. If the compound is understood structurally, stress is predictable to 'enlightened' readers. Thus, we could write it, but only for nonliterate or expatriate readers in their early progress through Primer I and into Primer II. Since stress is on the first syllable of morphemes, vowels are clearly contrastive in such stressed syllables, but in unstressed syllables, we have fewer contrastive phonemes as they tend to be phonetically centralised and not easily identifiable for spelling purposes. It may still be decided that we should use an acute accent in our I.T.A. version of the literacy materials in Elementary Primer I.

The question has been asked whether we should have set up shva [ə] as having sub-phonemic status with 'limited rights' to inclusion in the alphabet, but this has not been needed. We spell [tʰámər] 'foot' as /thamur/, the r in most environments being phonetically syllabic and we spell [ŋá.lamʰr̥] 'open plain' as /ngala-marr/ though -rr is often phonetically syllabic, filling a V-slot as syllable nucleus. Alternatively, the phonetically syllabic [r̥] fills a VC slot in dual function.

From univalent (nonsuspicious) examples, one learns by experience and increased familiarity with the newly discovered vocabulary, how to spell the ambivalent (suspicious) examples. By epenthetic clues, one inserts the nearest vowel identifiable when avoiding the proliferation of awkward-looking consonant clusters (CC sequences). You may wonder why we appear to insert the occasional u, i and a, just 'for nothing', especially if it might affect case-marking. I avoided this in the early stages, but as too many CC clusters were accumulating and some linguists said did I intend writing any transitional vocoids at all, I decided to write more obvious transitional vowels and the resultant system now seems consistent, satisfying to the teachers and emically acceptable to literate indigenous readers. Thus, instead of [ŋún̩] 'ocean', we write /ngunyun/ and allow /nguny-a -n/ for dative alongside the often heard /ngunyun-ak/. In /thamr/ 'foot', we insert the u, conditioned by the m and backed by the retroflexed [r̥] which is often audible as /thamur/ and allow the case form /thamarr/ for the ergative/instrumental and /thamer/ for the dative with no confusion in either.

And with regard to intrusive vocoids, vowel harmony or concord ensures that a back vowel follows a back vowel, a front vowel follows a front vowel and a central vowel follows a central vowel from syllable to syllable. The univalent cases give a clue for the ambivalent. In the case of prominent intrusive vocoids, if they disappear in isolation, apart from case affixation, then we do not write them:

e.g.	minh ³ kothon (minh)	kuuk ^u Thaayorre (kuuk)
but:	koow-pirk-a (pirk-a)	yan minh-a ngay (dative).

Certain consonants, by the very nature of their articulation, facilitate intrusive vocoids more easily over syllable borders, especially when at different points of articulation, the tongue tries to alter or regain its posture in transit. The amount of tongue movement required for the release of a consonant affects the amount and quality of the transitional vocoid. Here are two examples where we consider writing the vocoid unnecessary:

[kúl^umun] = /kulmun/ 'wooden food dish' which can hardly be pronounced without an intrusion of the backed central shva vocoid.

[yárr^ə mən] = /yarrman/ 'horse' which is similarly 2 syllables. We have scores more like this for frequent transitional vocoids are a strong feature of the diction and univalent examples must of necessity determine the resultant word-shape. Note the following combinations of one word-stem:

/yárr yárra!/ 'go away!'	/yárryarra/ 'farther on'	/yárra yárr!/ 'away (you) go!'
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It is foolish to persist in writing strange unpronounceable CC clusters when the insertion of the occasionally-heard vocoid makes the spelling acceptable in a consistent orthography pleasing to young indigenous readers. I used to write /pungthrr/ 'by the sun (instr.)' but now write /pung-thurr/; likewise the three morpheme word /yorrpnhrp/ 'just like that again' is now written /yorrp-nurrp/ in order to bypass orthographic stumbling stones in literacy for unsophisticated readers. Thus, a consistent policy must be followed with regard to certain main features affecting symbolisation like stress, vowel concord and syllabic consonants.

The structure of the syllable is important and the spelling of multisyllabled words may be 'solved' by a study of the non-suspicious ones. Are we to write [tʰáml] as /tham(u)l/ 'spear term' when one realises that ml is not an acceptable CC sequence though one like -ln is quite acceptable: /thaln/ 'spear term'.

/peln/ 'they' /meln.k-eln.k-arr/ 'tomorrow'.
Syllable types assist one in interpreting /pormp/ 'pour' and /thermp/ 'brackish' as one emic CVCCC syllable, as also in CVCC, /miinnng/ 'blow (of wind)' and CVC.CVCC /korkunm/ 'tree wax' or CVCC /puunm/ 'pity'. (See Appendix b (x)).

But what of [ŋótɲ] and [páɲtɲ] for which we have opted in favour of two syllables and write /ngotan/ 'black' and /petan/ 'skin'. However, it has not been easy to decide in favour of /kuln/ on the analogy of /thaln/ and /peln/ rather than /kulun/ 'possum'. On one occasion, when I purposely said /kulun/, my informant pulled me up sharply! That may be /film/ versus /filum/ all over again.

A rather difficult case is that of the demonstratives deriving from [iɲ'ɲ] written /inh'nh/ 'this, these'. Together with its optional initial ng- following a V-final word, we have /nginh'nh/ CVCCC with three digraphs written simply in ITA as /ih'h/ 'this'. Adding the focus marker (definite article), we have /inh'nth/ 'the-this' rather than the cumbrous /inh'nhth/ or even /nginh'nhth/.

know about their effect on listeners, so in Thaayorre, we separate vowels by prefixing ng- to a V-initial word following a vowel-final word. Contiguous Vs are not really acceptable and must normally be separated by ng- or at least a glottal stop, though we do not write the latter in such an environment. Sometimes V-initial roots are uttered with word-initial ng- even in isolation. Conversely, a -y- intervenes before many cases of the suffix -ak after i:

/Kelili-y-ak/ 'to Galilee'. But for 'canoe', we hear:

/kunu-thak/ with the basic /-thak/, not /kunu-w-ak/.

A strong tendency occurs to eliminate the initial letter of pronouns following their verb. This is reduction by elision of initial C(V)- so we sometimes hyphenate the residue:

/-(n)ul/ 'he, she/ it'; /(ng)amplin/ 'us, our';

/ (ng)anchin/ 'we (exc)' /(ng)ay/ or /(ng)ay 'I'

/ (n)unh/ 'him, her, it' /(ng)al/ 'you and I' etc.,

but we write them usually in full as the abbreviation disappears in repeated or slow speech or where the verb suffixial digraphs obtrude:

/mungk-unh-(ng)ay-(n)unh/ 'I want to eat it'.

Hyphenation is important, especially in early literacy. We do not hyphenate lexical classifiers to their nominal phrase-heads, but we do hyphenate in compounds where awkward CC sequences might reduce legibility for new literates, as at syllable borders.

Regarding the Initial Teaching Alphabet of the Elementary version of the basic Primer, we have produced some narratives eliminating all digraphs except -rr- for which we have no logical symbol such as R. The policy is stated in the E.Pr. preface.

Transfer to English is assisted by introducing a diglot format in Primer V though an example occurs prior to that since one story proved too short for the page and we included its translation into English. Teachers of English would do well to take note of the letters still untaught for English literacy after Primers I-V and possible VI, as special exercises should be devised for these in the transfer to English.

Our present orthography is pragmatic and offends no linguistic principle. It appears to be coping effectively with any confrontation from English, but the 'character' of the Thaayorre spelling is emerging and indigenous writers now begin to be able to state their view regarding the spelling of certain more 'difficult' words such as compounds.

We distinguish and write n-/nh- only in verb suffixes as that is phonemic except that n- follows -rr on the verbstem or as reciprocal/reflexive first-order suffix on the verbstem. Thus, n- follows -rr and any IV-th 'conjugation' verbstem, but nh- is to be found elsewhere. No contrast of n/nh occurs in non-verbal suffixes, so we do not bother to write the -h- as such n'-s are always dental. Summing up, as for word-initial n(h)-, we do NOT write the -h- at all except for the verb suffixes.

However, in ordinary word-stems, the phonemic distinction is always vital:

/min minch/	/minh minch/
'good very'	'animal truly'.

Appendix (a)

I cite the relative frequency of consonants in a corpus of 2348 words (M.A. Thesis, 1968, p.73):

k n ng p l nh r th rr m y w t ch ny'.

Consonants comprise two thirds of all phoneme tokens and vowels about one third. More consonants than vowels are elided in normal speech, but many transitional vowels intrude.

From pages 75 ff, I quote the relative frequency of CC sequences:

ln nth mp lp rk np rp rrp ngk nt in a corpus.

Word-medial sequences and/or word-final:

rrk ngk nth np n-ng mp rk nt nm.

CCC sequences:

lnk rnt nh'nh nch-n rngk rmp rnp rnth

and many such clusters if we bridge syllable borders.

Relative frequency of Thaayorre vowels is:

a u i aa e o ii uu ee oo.

Appendix (b)

Orthographic comparison with English:

(i) *no difference* in sound or symbol:

p t k (apart from unaspirated or voiced allophone inter-vocally, and that English has /kept/ versus /watp/ 'dead' '[ʔ] (glottal stop) is mostly written, unlike English: /wa'ap/ river' (cf /watap/ in Snake language.)
w y and l are virtually identical to English.

(ii) *same symbol* with different sound:

th- in /thothowol/ 'playing' is dental [t^h] but -th- is a voiced fricative allophone and interdental as in English 'their, there' - - .
ch, where the tongue posture is lamino-upper-dental and apico-lower-dental with minimal aspiration.
r which is positively retroflexed at the domal p.o.a.

- (iii) *entirely new* in English:
- b d j and g which almost occur as allophones, but never symbolize phonemes except that g occurs in velar nasal ng = ŋ
- f and v though fricative bilabial [ɸ] occurs in:
/paa-paarr/ 'crying' [p^ha:-ba:ɾ]
- h q s x and z are unknown to the vernacular, except that h appears in heavy aspiration.
- (iv) *comparison of punctuation:*
- the apostrophe is used to symbolize the glottal stop:
/mi'i/ 'buy, take' /ma'ar/ 'spider'
- (v) *comparison of vowel blends, glides, diphthongs:*
- sounds mostly known but transliteration different since the pattern CVC accounts for most V + w and V + y glides:
/yuy/ 'fear cry!' /wiiyth/ 'sore' /wey/ 'hey!'
/may/ 'food' /thaaw/ 'mouth' /koow/ 'nose'
/wuw/ 'meet' /woy.ngoth/ 'club'
- English
/cow/ = /kaw/ /boy/ = /poy/ /my/ = /may/
/came/ = /keym/ /doe/ = /thow/ /pea/ = /piy/
- (vi) *word families* are somewhat different:
- mostly new in English where rhyming and CC-clusters beginning syllables are very different:
bl- words, str- words, oc- words, com- words etc.
English words begin with (C) + (C) + (C) + V etc.
whereas Thaayorre words begin only with (C) + V.
cf. thaa-words ng- words man words yuk words etc.
though lexical classifiers are lacking in English.
- (vii) *Consonant clusters:*
- Many English sequences just do not occur in Thaayorre:
blanch crunch string clip bring little
It will be noted that Thaayorre syllable patterns allow for no more than one consonant before the syllabic nuclear vowel. Therefore, br-ing, spr-ing, str-ing, cr-ing, tr-ip etc. are strange to the indigenous ear, so that 'school' may become /kuul/ and 'stockman' becomes /thokmun/ and so on with reduction of the initial sequence.
- (viii) *Sounds occurring in different places:*
- rr- is never word-initial, but ng- likewise can never be word-initial in English: nginging is as impossible as rrirkir.
Alveolar t- and n- may begin words in English, but not normally in Thaayorre.

- (ix) *Interference between the two languages:*
 eng/ng n/nh t/th rr/r where English points of articulation are differently chosen.
 voicing and aspiration of 'voiceless' stops is different;
 intrusion of more transitional vocoids in the vernacular;
 non-pronunciation of many letters in English spellings:
 /wɔlk/chalk/talk/baulk cf. milk/silk/bulk
 farmer/work/part in which long vowel replaces the -r-.
- (x) *Syllable patterns different in English:*
 'bread' becomes /pelet/ 'sugar' becomes /chuk/
 'salt-water' becomes /cholwota/ 'motorcar' /mutkat/
 Thaayorre syllable shape is (C) V (C) (C) (C) :
 (C)V (C)VC (C)VCC (C)VCCC
 (k)a (ŋ)ih (h)erk (ŋ)ih'h (I.T.A.)
- (xi) *Stress patterns vary:*
 Thaayorre has three degrees of stress " ' and ø and may have more than one main stress in compounds, almost exactly as in English, except that basic rule is morpheme-initial! A binary analysis of stress explains the three Thaayorre degrees adequately.
- (xii) *Vernacular sound transferred to English: (and v.v.)*
 Voiceless stops used for voiced: pin/bin
 Terry / Derry Chon / John pox/ box
 CC- avoided: thunti / twenty tep / steps
 'sixth string' [siksθ striŋ] presents difficulty.
 Dental nh- and th- appear as a lisp word-initially.

Appendix (c)Phoneme Chart

Kuuk Thaayorre

Consonants:

6 stops	p	th	t	ch	k	'
5 nasals	m	nh	n	ny	ng	
5 others	w	l	rr	y	r	
6 digraphs	th	nh	rr	ch	ny	ng
I.T.A.	ʈ	h	rr	c	ɳ	ŋ
<u>Vowels:</u>						
5 short	a	e	i	o	u	
5 long	aa	ee	ii	oo	uu	

Alphabet:

a aa ch e ee i ii k l
m n ng nh ny o oo p r
rr t th u uu w y ' .

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Appendix (d)

- (i) Example of Kuuk Thaayorre in the Initial Teaching Alphabet used only in the Elementary Primer:

"Kuthip ih'nul may puun-mam wananir."

Ith pamal, ancina may puuh naath-han, gul gancin kana, paath puyk therkan-han, gul kana paath rintir. Peln parr'ir thaapirri kaarp yan.... "Nul pamal na-junp may puuh ulp kunuthur may hac"

- (ii) Standard Version:-

"Kuthip inh'nul may puunh-mam wananir".

Ith pamal nganchin may puunh naath-nhan ngul nganchin kana, paath pungk therkan-nhan, ngul kana paath rintir. Peln parr-ir thaapirri kaarp yan...

Nul pamal nangunp may puunh ulp kunuthur may thach...."